

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: HELEN'S STORY

### **Crime affects people in many different ways, and everyone has different ways of coping.**

One such way of coping is through Restorative Justice, the process which brings the victim of crime and offender in the case together, enabling them to communicate, giving the victim a chance to be heard and tell the offender how their actions have affected them.

This is the story of how restorative justice helped Helen following the death of her mum in a fatal collision in 2013:

“I remember the night before the crash so well. It had been a lovely night, I’d been chatting with my mum and we’d made plans to go out together the following morning to walk the dogs.

“I went to sleep and everything was fine, and then a couple of hours later, around 1.30am, I remember being awoken by a knock at the door. I went downstairs and opened the door to be greeted by a police officer who broke the news to me that my mum had suffered fatal injuries in a collision – I was devastated, my knees just buckled.

“After the police passed the news to me, it was then my job to pass the news on to everyone else. I just went into auto pilot, phoning all the family and friends to tell them the news. Having to phone my sisters was the hardest part; it was one of the worst things I have ever had to do in my entire life.

“I felt totally grief stricken, feeling pain and exhaustion. It felt impossible to accept, I just kept pleading and praying that it wasn’t true, the pain was endless.

“The next thing I had to do was identify my mum, which was so hard. We then had to wait to find out the actual cause of her death. But, three weeks after the crash and after two post mortems we still didn’t have an actual cause of death, which made everything even more complicated.

“Because we didn’t have a cause of death, we couldn’t get a death certificate. Instead, we were given a statement of death. This made this made discussions with banks, insurance companies and building societies so difficult. It was hard enough having to tell them that Mum was dead, but having to explain why we didn’t have a death certificate made it even worse – we had to relive the story over and over again.

“The next challenge I had to face was the court case, which took place eight months after the collision. During that time the person who had killed my mum was still out on the streets, still socialising and still driving around – it just seemed so unfair and unjust.

“I remember the trial so well, he was stood there in the dock, a cocky 18-year-old who showed no remorse whatsoever. The only explanation he had was, “I can’t remember”.

“It made me so angry. I just couldn’t get it out of my mind; I had so many unanswered questions. Why was he driving the car? Why did he take the keys? Why was he on the wrong side of the road? Why didn’t he brake, swerve or react? Why didn’t he go to see if my mum and her friend were alright? And all he could say was, “I can’t remember”.

“At court Michael pleaded guilty to death by dangerous driving and was given a six-year-sentence. I thought that the sentencing might bring some closure, maybe all the thoughts and questions would go away. But they didn’t, I just kept thinking about the circumstances of the crash.

“Over and over again I relived what happened that night. Mum was driving home from playing bridge with her friend. As she drove round the corner she was doing 38 mph, she slowed down and was when the two cars collided. She was only doing 1 mph, yet he was doing 58 mph at corner and 54mph at impact. She had done everything she possibly could to stop the crash, yet mum and her friend were dead and he was still here – she had saved his life, it just seemed so unfair.

“As the thoughts continued, I also started to have bad dreams. Being a nurse I know exactly what happens to people with the type of injuries that she sustained. It just haunted me, I just kept having the same thoughts.

“Twelve months after his sentencing, the thoughts and questions were still enduring and, to make it worse, I received a call telling me that Michael was being moved from a closed prison to an open prison. I just couldn’t understand why, was he a reformed character? What had he done to deserve only spending one year in closed prison when my mum was dead?

“My dreams continued and I kept going over in my mind what could have happened, putting myself in my mum’s position. Did she say anything when she saw the car coming towards her? Did she survive impact? Was she in any pain?

“As a nurse, I’d expected to nurse my mum when she needed it. I wanted to look after her in her times of need, but because of his actions I’ll never get that opportunity – it just makes me so sad.

“Finally, I decided to bite the bullet and meet with Michael so I could try and find out why he did what he did. I met him at Thorn Cross Prison in Warrington, in a Restorative Justice meeting that was organised by my case officer Julie who works for Remedi.

“I remember going into the meeting, I was so nervous, I was about to speak to the man who killed my mum – but it was something I had to do. I needed answers to all the questions that were running through my mind and in my dreams, and he was the only person that could give me the answers.

“Before the meeting I was close to going to the doctors as I felt that I couldn’t cope with the anger and grief. But having spoken to Michael, I now have the answers to all those questions and I’ve been able to let go of the anger and actually grieve for my mum, like a normal person experiences grief.”